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SUBJECT: OLD CASELOAD IDPS IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. DART Field Team South met on 6 May with two extended families and their neighbors in a poor section of Basrah to assess their water and food needs. Most inhabitants of the area are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), some of who have been squatting on other people's land since the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. The families said that since the recent hostilities began six weeks ago, their greatest concerns are a lack of security, scarcity of cooking fuel, dwindling incomes, and the threat of being forcibly evicted from homes they have been living in for many years. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

2. The DART, assisted by two women who work as monitors for the U.N. World Food Program, met for two hours with two families, of ten members each, in the Abo Al Khsib neighborhood in south-central Basrah. The group discussed their concerns about food, security, and other issues. Both families, as well as some of their neighbors, were displaced from the Faw peninsula. One family was forced to leave in the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. The other family fled their home in the first Gulf war in 1990.

3. The Abo Al Khsib neighborhood is in a poor section of town in south-central Basrah, where the two families and their neighbors live in an adjoining series of one-story, mud-brick rooms, built around small courtyards. The rooms have earthen floors, and those used as sleeping quarters are covered by a carpet remnant and woven straw mats.

CURRENT SITUATION

4. Most family members and their neighbors said security was their primary concern. One woman said the 'bad elements' in the area, recognized by everyone in the neighborhood before the war, have now enriched themselves by looting guns and food commodities. She said the criminals often roam the area, settling disputes by shooting people.

5. Another woman complained about the lack of propane gas for cooking fuel. She said she has spent an average of 7,000 Iraqi dinars every three to four days to buy a wagonload of palm wood to use as fuel. Before the war, she says four canisters of propane gas for an entire month cost 1,200 Iraqi Dinars. Now, she has empty gas canisters but cannot find fuel in the market.

6. The water situation in the neighborhood has improved with non-potable water running in pipelines, which before the war were empty. However, obtaining drinking water is still a challenge; a U.N. Children's Fund water tanker was delivering drinking water during the visit by the DART, but it was only the third such trip to the area since the start of the war.

7. When asked whether their families had enough food, the DART was told that the rations under the Oil for Food Program were never enough to feed their families. They said all the commodities ran out before the end of the month, and that the milk ration ran out quickly. They felt that a double package of rations would be sufficient to meet their needs for one month. They received double rations in February to cover the months of April and May, and the last

distribution of a double ration, distributed in mid-March, one week before the war began, was referred to as the June/July distribution. One family had only part of the wheat flour and rice rations left.

18. The families say food prices in the Basrah market have fluctuated almost daily since the war. Some items, such as vegetable oil and sugar, commodities largely looted from a local warehouse and which now glut the market, are less expensive. They cited as examples the prices of several staple items: pre-war one kilogram (kg) of tea cost 2,000 dinars; the same amount now costs 3,000 dinars. Before the war, one kg of powdered milk cost 500 dinars; it is now 5,000 dinars. One kg of rice was 250 dinars before the war; it is now 350 dinars. One kg of sugar, which was 600 dinars before the war, is now 250 dinars. One kg of vegetable oil was 600 dinars before the war; it now costs between 300 and 500 dinars.

19. One of the extended families, with four sons and seven daughters, relies on the income of one male head of household. Before the war, he had a job as a construction worker, earning between 2,000 and 2,250 Iraqi dinars per day but now earns only between 1,000 and 1,500 dinars per day mowing grass for animal feed.

110. The other family has four sons and three daughters. All of the sons are educated, one having a Master's degree, but none can find a full-time job. A daughter, who is a teacher, had to stop working just before the war to give birth to a child.

111. The two families had a small reserve of livestock: one sheep, that was being fattened for slaughter, and four goats.

112. Another concern expressed by the two families and their neighbors was eviction from their homes. They said government officials came to the area last year, confiscating all their furniture and demanding that they vacate the premises. Now, they fear, some other official or landowner will come and demand the same. They asked the DART if it could help, and give them guidance on what recourse they have if such an action were to take place.

113. The DART has notified the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has been given the mandate to care for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, about the existence of the IDPs in the neighborhood. IOM says it will follow up on the areas visited by the DART.

JONES